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### THE MEANING OF SOCIAL SCIENCE<sup>1</sup>

This is a group of ten lectures delivered before a company of graduate students from various departments, called by the author social science departments, of the University of Chicago, in the year 1909-10. Two main themes are developed in the first five chapters: first, that there must be a fundamental and underlying unity to all the studies which have to do with society; second, that there is no such unity in the present state of the social sciences unless it be found in the study of sociology. The author does not, it is true, insist upon the name of sociology, but merely upon the necessity of a study, of whatever name, which will bring together in one body of knowledge the essential and unifying principles common to all the special sciences that have to do with social relations. The next four chapters attempt to trace, through its several phases, the actual development of this unified social science. These four phases, each one of which is the subject of a chapter, are named the descriptive, the analytical, the evolutionary, and the constructive phases. The final chapter is on the future of social science.

The author has stated his views so frequently, always with such peculiar force and pungency, that everyone is already familiar with his general point of view. In this work he has massed his arguments more systematically and completely than anywhere else, so far as the reviewer is aware, and the well-known vigor and sledge-hammer quality of the author's style has never been better displayed. Every chapter bristles with epigrams which lend themselves readily to quotation by the partisans of his school, and are peculiarly irritating to his opponents. Without intending it, perhaps without even being aware of it, the author is always a controversialist, and throughout the whole work there is a distinct controversial tone, though his manner is always dignified and courteous. If one might venture a criticism upon a writer of such standing as the author, it would be to the effect that there is, in this book, sometimes more

<sup>1</sup> *The Meaning of Social Science*, by Albion W. Small; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1910. 8vo, pp. 309. \$1.50 net.

kaleidoscopic brilliancy of phraseology than is consistent with the greatest clearness and precision of statement.

Beginning with the proposition that there *must* be unity in all the social sciences, the author leads gradually up to his first large generalization, which he calls the major premise of his argument, viz., that the "*main function of the social sciences is to make out the meaning of human experience.*"<sup>2</sup> It occurs to one at once to ask, "which meaning?" Is it, then, certain that human experience has a meaning, or is it certain that it has not many meanings? What does it mean to find out the meaning of human experience? A proposition which is itself so difficult to understand really does not get us very far toward our goal, which is to find out the meaning of social science. For a metaphysical poet like Shelley life and experience may have a very different meaning from that which they have for an unpoetic biologist like Darwin. Is it the task of the social scientist to pass judgment on these two men and their points of view?

The reviewer confesses that he is not helped by this statement of the major premise. It may be a misinterpretation, and if so the reviewer would apologize; but it seems probable that it really means that it is the function of the social sciences to make out the meaning *to the social scientist* of human experience, which is little better than saying that it is the function of the social sciences to find out what the social scientist wants to find out. By way of illustration, however, the author refers to the experience of Germany during the 400 years between 1510 and 1910. A great many things happened in that time, and a great many factors were at work in changing the Germany of 1510 to the different Germany of 1910. It is the mission of social science to unravel the network of forces and explain such experiences, that is, if that is what the social scientist wants to find out. The reviewer admits that he would like to be able to solve just such a problem, but he is not certain that he would say that he had "made out the meaning of human experience" even if he had solved the problem. Shelley might not have cared to solve that problem, and probably would have denied that in solving such a problem one had made out the meaning of human experience, except in the sense brought out in Tennyson's "Flower in the Crannied Wall," that a full understanding of one

<sup>2</sup> P. 18. The italics are the author's.

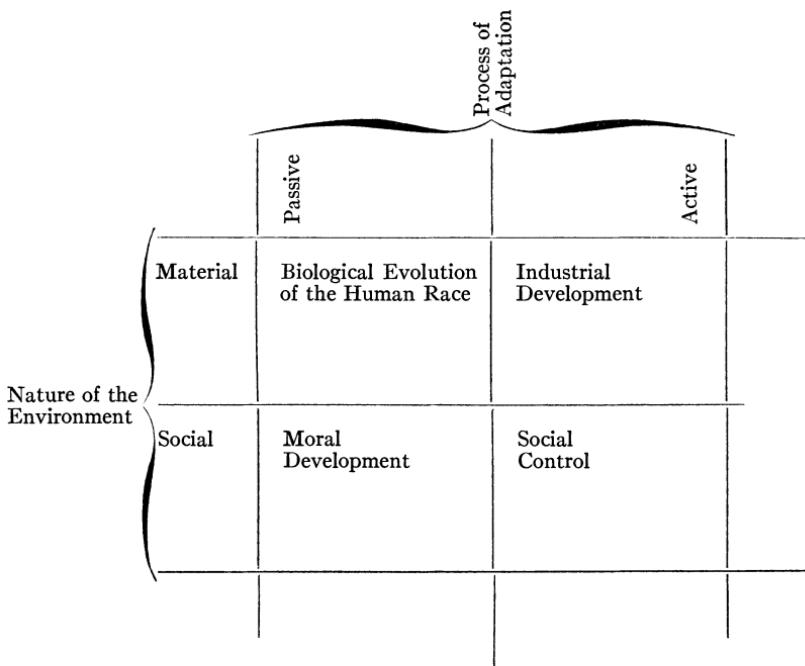
little fact or event requires a complete understanding of the universe and God.

Human life, the author well says, is a connected whole. There ought, therefore, to be some way of studying that connected whole. Upon this we shall all probably agree. But in his arraignment of the present state of social science, in his chapter on "The Disunity of the Social Sciences," the reviewer thinks that he goes too far. Every phase of human life comes within the purview of the economist. The economist really does view life as a connected whole; but always from the economic standpoint. This gives unity to the social sciences in precisely the sense in which there is any unity in the physical sciences. The chemist does not confine himself to a special part of the material universe. Every particle of matter in the universe he regards as coming within his field, but he views it always from the point of view of the chemist. It is through chemical law that the universe is unified for him. As a matter of fact, there is unity in the social sciences today if we only know where to look for it. If the author will take the trouble to look over the *Outline* of the introductory course in economics in his own university, he will find as much to reveal the essential unity of all human experience as he will find in any course in sociology in the country.

On p. 137 the author gives greater definiteness to his major premise by means of the formula, "*Men's experience is the evolution of human values.*" This reveals a great deal more than it appears to do at first. In the first place, it shows that he is interested in the evolution of human values, and, therefore, experience has that meaning for him. In this the reviewer agrees with him. In the second place, it shows, when followed up, that human industry, statecraft, religion, etc., are really determined by the sense of value, or the actual valuation placed upon things from time to time.

It is difficult for a reviewer to resist the temptation to air his own views. Will the reader therefore pardon the present lapse? It seems to the present reviewer that the problem of social science is to understand the problem of human adaptation. The economist has come nearer to solving that problem than anyone else, but he has not always seen the problem whole. In fact, he has frequently confined himself to one small part of the problem, though he has usually been conscious of the larger whole. Adaptation is of two sorts, according to the process by which it takes place. It is

*active* when the environment is modified to fit the organism. It is also of two sorts according to the environment which surrounds the organism. The environment is either *material* or *social*. A cross-classification according to these two bases of characterization gives us four general subdivisions of the subject as shown in the accompanying diagram.



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## WASHINGTON NOTES

THE BANK GUARANTY DECISION

UNCONSTITUTIONALITY OF THE PEONAGE LAW

POTASH NEGOTIATIONS

WOMAN AND CHILD LABOR INQUIRY

ARGUMENT IN THE RATE CASES

THE TARIFF COMMISSION BILL

The Supreme Court of the United States has rendered what will probably rank as a leading decision in connection with the guaranty of bank deposits. This is the opinion in the case of